



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

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For Immediate Release

WATER STOVES AND WOOD-FIRED FURNACES POSE HEALTH RISKS

(November 28, 2005)— The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services wants people to be aware of the health risks associated with water stoves or outdoor wood-fired furnaces before installing one on their property.

“High fuel costs this winter have led people to seek alternative heating sources,” said Dr. Robert Thiboldeaux, a toxicologist with the Department. “While manufacturers promote the outdoor furnaces as a source of inexpensive renewable energy, the smoke produced during the normal operation of an outdoor wood-fired furnace can cause health problems.”

Most people are not harmed by small amounts of wood smoke, but prolonged exposure to heavy smoke can lead to serious health problems. Smoke can irritate the eyes and nose and cause breathing difficulty, wheezing, coughing, and headaches, especially for people with existing asthma or cardio-respiratory problems. Wood smoke is made up of chemicals that have been shown to cause cancer.

Outdoor wood-fired furnaces provide heating and/or hot water in the place of traditional indoor oil or gas furnaces. Because outdoor boilers typically have short smoke stacks, the smoke they give off tends to hang near to the ground and disperse slowly. A unit placed too close to a home will lead to a house full of smoke during times that the stove is smoldering or heating up.

Check your local municipality for regulations regarding the use of outdoor wood-fired furnaces, be sure to only burn dry untreated wood as fuel, and do not install outdoor wood-fired furnaces within 500 feet of the nearest neighboring residence.

To save energy this winter, lower the thermostat in your home, make sure your home is well insulated, use storm doors and windows, use fluorescent bulbs instead of incandescent (regular) light bulbs, and set your hot water heater at 120 degrees or lower.

For a full list of energy saving tips and information about energy bill payment assistance, see Governor Doyle’s Energy Help website online at: <http://www.energyhelp.wi.gov/>.

For guidelines and other information regarding wood furnaces visit:
<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/eh/HlthHaz/fs/waterstoves.htm>

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